COMMUNITY NOTIFICATION SYSTEM (CENS)

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is CENS?

CENS is the Community Emergency Notification System. The system is designed to rapidly notify a predefined area of an emergency by sending a recorded message through the telephone system.

2. How did CENS come about?

The Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) filed a lawsuit against a private business for environmental issues. A portion of that judgment was designated to be used for a system to notify residents during times of emergency.

3. How did MAG become involved in the CENS program?

MAG answered a Request For Proposals (RFP) issued by ADEQ, which was searching for an entity to oversee the CENS program. MAG was the successful bidder on the RFP.

4. How does CENS work?

CENS uses the 9-1-1 database to extract phone numbers that are geocoded or designated on a map. When a circle or area is drawn on the CENS map, it will launch a prerecorded message to those telephone numbers in that specified area.

5. Will CENS work with cell phones?

Cell phones or wireless phones are not part of the 9-1-1 database. Currently, developers are working to create the ability to send the message to cell phones using text message technology.

6. How will the call appear in Caller ID?

Several telephone carriers are used to send the message, so the Caller ID display may vary. Primarily, the display will show "Priority Alert" or "Alert Call." The outbound calling platform used to deliver the messages is located in Boulder, Colorado, so the Caller ID will show a Colorado exchange.

7. How does CENS handle non-English speaking households?

The message is recorded at the local 9-1-1 Center or Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP). The dispatcher will record the message in any necessary languages. Typically, the message will be read first in English, then repeated in Spanish, so all households will hear both versions of the message. For the hearing impaired, CENS is capable of detecting Teletypewriter (TTY) or Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) technology. The equipment will bypass the voice-recorded portion and submit a text message when a TTY or TDD is detected.

8. What if the phone is busy when the system calls?

The system is designed to attempt to call back if the line is busy or if there is no answer. The system will wait 3 minutes before a second callback is made. If the line is still busy or is not answered, the system will wait an additional 3 minutes before attempting a final time to make contact.

9. How does the system work when it reaches an answering machine or voice mail?

The system is designed to leave a message on voice mail or on an answering machine.

10. What happens if a resident moves or a new phone is installed?

Qwest Communications is the custodian of the 9-1-1 database and is required to keep the 9-1-1 database current when a service order is received for a new phone or if a phone is moved to a different location. This applies to all telephone carriers that offer local service. Like Qwest, these local providers are required to put changes and additions into the 9-1-1 database.

11. How is CENS affected by a telephone system that is on a Private Branch Exchange (PBX)?

For CENS to deliver a message to individual lines through a PBX, the PBX system must have a separate database built in. Many PBX systems already have a product in use called PS-ALI. PS-ALI delivers location information on a 9-1-1 call that is made through a PBX system. Without this added database, the 9-1-1 call will only display the location of the main switchboard of the PBX. In the CENS program, messages will be delivered to individual phones if the PBX uses PS-ALI type of database, otherwise it will deliver a single message to the main number listed on the PBX.

For more information, please call 602-254-6300.

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